

Living With Your On-Site Sewage Disposal System

If you are new to rural life, you probably have never given much thought to one common aspect of living “in the country”. This would be your septic system. In town, your waste water leaves your house, goes to the central waste water treatment plant, where it is treated by trained specialists. This water then goes away and is never thought of again.

When your home is connected to a septic system, your waste is your own responsibility. This responsibility can have environmental consequences far beyond the boundaries of your own property.

Function

The septic tank provides a place for waste water flow to slow down long enough for the solids can settle out. This “treated” water flows into the leach field, where it percolates through the soil which cleanses it. This is a simple system, but it only works if you take care of your system.

With proper care and maintenance, a septic tank will require pumping every 2 – 4 years. Your County Health Department can provide you with a list of licensed septic pumpers. Neglect of a septic tank is the most common cause of damage to the leachfield. When the tank is not pumped routinely, sludge and scum build up to the point where they are carried into the leachfield and block the flow of liquid into the soil. When this occurs, the leachfield must be replaced, which is an expensive project.

Many homeowners inquire about the best type of septic additive to add to their system. The answer to this question is very simple: None! Proper use (see next section) will ensure a healthy and stable bacterial population. Bacteria are vital to the breakdown of the solids. The best way to prevent septic failure is to observe the routine pumping schedule.

Failing septic systems have the potential to risk human health through the exposure to raw sewage and the contamination of ground water supplies. If you have questions about an improperly functioning septic system, please call Elbert County Health. If you have questions about installing a new system, please contact the Elbert County Building Dept.

Septic Do's and Don'ts:

- Do: Pump your tank regularly. Alternate leachfields every spring if your system has dual leachfields.

- Do: Limit the use of drain solvents, household chemical, strong disinfectants and chlorine. Continual rather than moderate use of these substances can inhibit bacterial action, causing rapid buildup of solids in the tank.

Do: Keep a diagram showing the location of your septic tank and leachfield in relation to your house. Keep records on septic pumping or service on the premises regardless of current ownership.

Don't: Dispose of sanitary napkins, tampons, diapers, paper towels, cooking oil, grease, solvents, paint, etc. in your septic system. Garbage disposals should be used sparingly in connection with a septic system. Coffee grounds, fats, and meats should never be run through your garbage disposal into a septic system.

Don't: Park or drive vehicles over or allow large animals on any part of your septic system.

Don't: Plant large shrubs or trees over or near the septic area because roots can cause damage to the pipes.

Don't: Place sprinkler systems close to the leachfield. All surface water runoff should be directed away from this area to prevent further saturation of the soil.